## THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Elections to the Constituent Assembly were scheduled for December. Extensive preparations had been made, all parties had nominated their candidates, and the electoral campaign was in full swing when the Communists seized power in Petrograd. In the hectic propaganda barrage that preceded the coup, the Bolsheviks accused the Provisional Government of sabotaging the elections and promised to carry them out at once. After they seized power, they did their best to get a majority in the Assembly so that the elections would amount to a popular endorsement of their coup. Sweeping decrees promising everything to everybody followed one another. At the same time the Communists had monopolized all channels of propaganda, harassing and closing the opposition newspapers, prohibiting public meetings of the opposition parties, and jailing the opposition candidates.

Elections took place late in December. A cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress was transformed into an election booth. Together with the members of the deposed government, I cast my ballot. We had no illusion about the outcome of the contest of ballots against bullets.

We underestimated, however, the political maturity of the Russian people. The voters sternly disowned the usurpers of power. The Bolsheviks prevented tabulation of the votes, but the result was revealed by the composition of the Constituent Assembly. On the day it convened, 707 deputies registered at the Tauride Palace. Among them, 175 were Communists and non-partisan fellow travelers and 40 were left-wing S-R, ready to side with the Communists. The right-wing S-R had won 370 seats. Of the remaining 122 seats, 86 had gone to national minorities, all anti-Bolshevist, 17 to the Cadets, and 16 to the Mensheviks, while the party affiliation of 3 deputies was not ascertained. Many of the 101 absent deputies were in jail. In all, the Communists, the left S-R, and their sympathizers captured only about 25 to 26 per cent of the seats. Only 2 per cent of the people voted for the Cadets. More than 70 per cent voted for the moderate Socialists.

The official history of the Communist party, published two decades later, makes no mention of the Constituent Assembly as a slogan used in the November coup and refers to it only in enumerating the tasks the Bolsheviks faced after the seizure of power. Their job of dissolving the "capitalist" Constituent Assembly is mentioned along with the liquidation of all kinds of counterrevolutionary organizations.

In December, 1917, things did not look as simple as that. After having promised to expedite the convocation of the Assembly, the People's Commissars could not tell the people bluntly that they